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SOME COMPARISONS BETWEEN NCRE MEMBERS AND OTHER READING RESEARCHERS.

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FINDINGS FROM A STUDY OF RESEARCH ORIENTATION AMONG READING EXPERTS ARE REPORTED. WHILE INVOLVEMENT IN RESEARCH IS USUALLY DISCOURAGED BY HEAVY TEACHING LOADS, MEAGER RESEARCH FACILITIES, LACK OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT, AND NONRESEARCH ORIENTED BACKGROUND, MANY EXPERTS HAD NOT ENGAGED IN RESEARCH EVEN UNDER FAVORABLE CONDITIONS. HENCE, RESEARCH TRAINING, PAST AND PRESENT RESEARCH EXPERIENCE, AND RESEARCH IDEOLOGY WERE USED AS INDICES TO IDENTIFY RESEARCH ORIENTED EXPERTS. IT WAS FOUND THAT SEX, THE QUALITY OF THE SCHOOL ATTENDED, AND THE TYPE OF DEGREE EARNED WERE FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO RESEARCH ORIENTATION. A COMPARISON OF EXPERTS WHO WERE MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON RESEARCH IN ENGLISH (NCRE) WITH NONMEMBERS INDICATED THAT NCRE MEMBERS DID NOT CONFORM TO PATTERNS USUALLY ASSOCIATED WITH HIGH RESEARCH ORIENTATION. THE NCRE OF THE PAST HAD UNKNOWINGLY ENCOURAGED INBREEDING AND HAD PREVENTED WORK WITH OTHER FIELDS. THE PRESENT NCRE TREND, HOWEVER, IS TOWARD MEMBERSHIP BY NONEDUCATORS AND INTERDISCIPLINARY CONSULTATION. THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED TO THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON RESEARCH IN ENGLISH (NEW YORK, FEBRUARY 17-18, 1967). (NS)

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SOME COMPARISONS BETWEEN NCRE MEMBERS AND OTHER READING RESEARCHERS

Address to National Conference on Research in English
February 18, 1967

By David E. Wilder
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During the course of our recent study of the field of reading at Columbia, I conducted seventy-six rather lengthy interviews with prominent individuals. Forty-five of the persons interviewed are now active or associate members of NCRE. I also sent questionnaires to approximately 1,300 persons variously identified as experts on reading. Of the 964 usable returns, 100 were from individuals who were members of NCRE at that time. Thus I stand before many people to whom I owe a sincere debt of gratitude, and apologies. I know of no more appropriate way to repay the debt owed respondents than to let them know the findings of the study to which they have contributed. We have been slow in making many of the findings from this study available to the public but, hopefully, the study of the reading experts will be published in the very near future.

Today I should like to tell you about some of the more salient findings from the study of reading experts and to examine responses from the 100 NCRE members in the light of these findings.

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The study of experts on reading has been given the cumbersome title of "The Reading Experts: A Case Study of the Failure to Institutionalize an Applied Science of Education." It is a study which falls into both the sociology of science and the sociology of education. As the title suggests, its central thesis is that the field of reading is but one example of a general failure to institutionalize an applied science of education. From this perspective, the fact that

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many of the basic issues argued in the field of reading today are essentially the same as those argued 100 years ago is but one symptom of the more general failure to institutionalize an applied science of education. I do not regard this failure as the fault of any particular individuals or groups but rather the result of social forces which were largely beyond the control of the chief participants.

In order to document this thesis the study first presents a sociological model of science borrowing heavily from the writings of Barber,[2] Ben-David,[3] Kuhn,[4] Merton.[5] From the sociological perspective, science is seen as having distinguishing sets of norms and values, conceptual schemes, social organization, and societal supports. A brief history of the field of reading is then juxtaposed against this model of science to show points of similarity and difference.

One of the interesting aspects of this history is that the geneology or pedigree of the early reading researchers, such as Cattell and Judd, begins in the famous laboratory of Wundt in Leipzig, the same laboratory to which Boring[6] has traced many of the eminent psychologists who later became starred in the first seven volumes of American Men of Science. However, succeeding generations of reading researchers have become increasingly distant from the mainstream of behavioral science, in spite of this common heritage. An important factor in this trend was the emergence of the schools of education at the large American universities during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Early leaders in the field of reading were trained for research outside of education. But they soon went to work in the schools of education where the chief concerns and pressures were for teaching and service, rather than for research. In many cases the early leaders became heavily committed to teaching and service activities themselves once they were cut off from the disciplines in which they were trained; and those who were firmly committed to research were unable to establish

the conditions for its continued pursuit within the schools of education.

Much of the early research on reading is included among the best of its day in any of the behavioral sciences, and the period running through the 1920's has since been characterized as the time of the "Scientific Movement" in American education.[7] But few graduate students in education were primarily interested in doing research, and there was neither high priority nor financial support for research from the schools of education or from outside sources. Without these supports, it was not possible for reading research to progress much beyond the level of its early beginnings.

There were important changes taking place in the conceptual schemes of most sciences during the first half of the twentieth century. However, many of these changes went unheeded in the schools of education with the result that there were many inconsistencies between the content of a subject as taught in most elementary or secondary schools and as taught in the better colleges or universities. In mathematics and in the physical sciences this cultural lag has led to massive curriculum reforms and to the retraining of teachers during recent years. A similar, though less dramatic gap, now exists between the social sciences and social foundations or social studies. As Cronbach[8] and others have pointed out, since the 1920's there have also been changes taking place in psychology, both in Europe and in the United States, but educational psychology in the United States has remained largely unchanged. This was also the period when structural linguistics emerged, but it too failed to have an impact in the schools of education.

Progress in science is usually accompanied by changes in its conceptual schemes. But with neither the stimulation that developments in psychology and linguistics could provide, nor the facilities to do extensive research, the

conceptual schemes of reading became relatively fixed. At the same time, many of the research leaders in the field became connected with publishing houses as editors of basal readers and identified with particular materials and methods of teaching reading in the schools. Eventually, the economic considerations of competing publishing companies and the bureaucratic pressures of school systems joined to fix methods and materials within a fairly similar mold throughout the United States. In addition, while most scientific fields are partly protected from public criticism by their technical language, the constant necessity for instructing large groups of teachers at a level they could easily understand meant that no significant communication gap developed to insulate the reading experts from the criticism of the educated public. This, in my opinion, was the situation in reading when the field came under widespread attack in the 1950's.

The Survey of Experts.

Analysis of the survey data from the 964 reading experts had three chief objectives. (1) to test my rendition of the social history of the field, (2) to determine the extent to which respondents had actually been engaged in research throughout their careers, and (3) to identify the factors which have promoted or hindered research in their careers.

A brief overview of the careers of the reading experts provides little reason for expecting high research productivity from them. Starting with the graduate student years, the typical expert was already a schoolteacher who, without benefit of the graduate fellowships which are now so numerous, had to work as a full-time teacher and a part-time student. Comparisons with studies of other professions reveal that the decision to obtain a doctorate was made later by the experts than by those in other fields, and the degree took longer to earn -- a

median of fifteen years between the baccalaureate and the doctorate. Courses taken were heavily concentrated in education, teaching methods, and applied psychology. Only a minority took any courses in children's literature, linguistics, anthropology, sociology, or experimental psychology, and few ventured beyond the one required course in research design and methods. Yet, satisfaction with graduate training received is higher for the reading experts than Berelson[9] found in any other graduate field, and 86% felt they had been trained "well" or "very well" as professional researchers.

Careers subsequent to receipt of the doctorate are characteristically dominated by teaching and by service activities. The typical expert has become a full-time professor at a college or university, he has done and often continues to do, clinical and remedial reading work; he has become associated with a publishing house in producing materials to be used in teaching children to read or textbooks for training teachers; he teaches courses on reading; and he travels an academic Chatauqua circuit giving speeches and demonstrations to teachers. He also does research. But not very much research. Only small proportions of the 964 respondents have ever worked as full-time researchers, have ever applied for or received research grants, or have ever worked on interdisciplinary research teams. At the time of the survey, less than half of the respondents claimed to be spending any time doing research, and less than 10% received any of their income for doing research. Yet 50% reported they had published research articles or monographs, and 40% claimed to have published research articles or monographs on reading since receiving the doctorate.

The pressure for service and teaching within the schools of education has created conditions which have made it difficult, if not impossible, for anyone to do extensive research. Unusually heavy teaching loads and the lack of financial

support for the sustained efforts that many of the problems of education require have been important factors as well. However, there is ample evidence that many experts would not have been predisposed to do much research even if the conditions had been favorable. The culture of education does not value research as highly as it values teaching and service, and a majority of reading experts subscribes to this order of priority. By way of illustration, just 13% of the experts ranked research first as their occupational preference, and less than half ranked research among their top three preferences. Only 24% disagreed with the statement that "teaching is intrinsically more satisfying than research;" 78% agreed that "In education teaching experience is a necessary part of research training;" and 63% agreed that "People in the reading field get more prestige and recognition for editing basal readers than for doing research." In addition, a majority said that in the long run they would rather be remembered "throughout the institution and communities where they work" than "among specialists in their field at different institutions."[10]

With values such as these predominating, with heavy workloads at the colleges and universities where they teach, with meagre research facilities and virtually no financial support, why should any research get done at all? One reason is, of course, in order to have something to publish. The "publish or perish" norm is a part of the culture of education as much as of any other field; and reading has consistently been the area of education in which the most articles are published every year. Indeed, just 287 respondents claimed 3000 research articles or monographs on reading among them. It is difficult to imagine how the small amount of time and facilities that have been reported as devoted to research on reading over the years could produce so many research articles. Upon inspection it turns out that much of what has been called research in education and in reading

would not be called research in other fields. But perhaps more interesting from the sociological perspective is the fact that something called research continued to be important in the field and to play a symbolic role. Thus even though a large majority of respondents preferred other activities to research, 80% said they planned to do research in the future.

As previously mentioned, one of my chief interests in doing the survey of the experts was to attempt to find out which experiences in their careers were most strongly related to research oriented behavior. Several general findings emerged from this effort, and some of these have been confirmed by other investigators since.[11] For instance, it was possible to score the type of graduate training received along the dimensions of training for teaching or training for research, according to the types of courses taken and whether the respondent had ever worked as a research assistant or as a schoolteacher. The relationship between the two types of training was just slightly negative. Indices were also made of past research experience, research ideology, and present research activities. Relationships between each of these indices were strong and positive. Research training led to further research activity after the doctorate, and to ideology supportive of research, and these in turn led to more research activity at the time the questionnaire was answered. Teacher training worked in the opposite direction with each of the research indices. Using these indices, I was able to differentiate a minority of reading experts whose careers could be characterized as research oriented from the majority who were more oriented toward teaching and service, and to ask which factors best accounted for these differences.

Some of the results are surprising, others merely confirm what some of you have been saying for years. I report only those relationships which persist even when the others mentioned are held constant. To begin with, the schools one attends

make a big difference at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Using the quality ratings of colleges and universities developed in other studies,[12] I found that those who had attended high ranking liberal arts colleges or universities did more research than those who attended teachers colleges or other lower ranked schools. Similarly, those who obtained the doctorate from the top ten universities more often became researchers than those whose doctorates were from lower ranked universities. In other words, there seemed to be a spillover of the quality ranking of the school from other fields into education and into reading, and this was reflected by the extent to which research was emphasized. Similar differences in research emphasis can be seen in the careers and current activities of those who are now working at these higher ranked universities. Thus, one important aspect of the general stratification of American institutions of higher learning is the extent to which research is emphasized in education.

The type of doctorate earned is also strongly related to the research orientation of the experts. There has been debate for some years about whether the PhD in education should be a research degree and the EdD a professional degree, and the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education did an elaborate study for Phi Delta Kappa[13] a few years ago which concluded that there was really no difference between the two degrees and their recipients. My results are radically different. In the field of reading, PhD's are far more research oriented throughout their careers than Ed.D's. (I might add that the recent study of Buswell and McConnell[14] at California also finds differences in research productivity which consistently favor the PhD over the EdD in Education.)

A third persistent factor in the research orientation of reading experts is sex. Women are less research oriented than men. Since women constitute 37% of the respondents, this is a factor which cannot be ignored in the field of reading.

Each of these factors continues to operate when controlled for the others. For instance, women with PhD's do more research than women with EdD's. but not as much as men with PhD's. Similarly, those with PhD's from top ranked universities do more research than those with PhD's from lower ranked schools, and more than the EdD's from the top universities. When these factors are combined, the results are cumulative. Thus virtually everyone who went to the better schools, earned a PhD, and who now works at a top ranked university scores high on all the research measures, while virtually all the women who went to teachers colleges, who earned EdD's from less prestigious universities, and who now work at lesser known schools score low on each of these same measures.

When one compares recipients of the doctorate before 1930, with those who received the degree during the thirties, with those who received the degree in the forties, and so on, it becomes clear that the historical trend has been away from research according to each of the indices devised. But most of this trend is accounted for by the emergence of the EdD which has become the most frequently awarded degree in recent years.

Some of the most interesting findings arise from the questions which we asked respondents about one another, such as who they think has done the best research on reading and who has influenced them the most in the field. When responses to these items were tallied, it was immediately apparent that a small number of prominent individuals had been especially influential in the field. Whichever measure of prominence or leadership was used, the respondents named by others proved to be far more research oriented than those not named.

Responses of NCRE Members

But what does all this have to do with the NCRE? More often than not, acknowledged leaders in the field belong to NCRE. As I see it, the NCRE is a

rather unique fraternity of the elite in the field of reading. Its members are far different from other reading experts in that they are more research oriented than others in the field, but they are similar in that the factors related to research activity are much the same for both members and non-members.

The NCRE is an elite because disproportionate numbers of its membership are acknowledged as leaders in the field. There are many ways in which this could be demonstrated, but I shall use responses to the relational questions that respondents were asked about one another. For example, 54% of the NCRE respondents were named by other respondents as influencing them, and just 10% of the non-members of NCRE were named. Similarly, 40% of the NCRE respondents were named by others as among those who had done the best research on reading, while just 7% of the non-members were named. In addition, 39% of the NCRE respondents were named by others as having directed their dissertations compared with just 5% of the non-members; and 20% of the NCRE members were named as having had other respondents as research assistants compared with 3% of the non-members.

Not surprisingly, then, when the 100 respondents who belong to NCRE are compared with the 864 who do not, the former show more of a research orientation according to every measure we devised. 57% score high on the research training index compared with 38% of the non-members, 53% score high on the past research index compared with 35% of the non-members, 60% score high on the research ideology index compared with 41% of the non-members, and 64% score high on present research compared with 39% of the non-members. But within NCRE, PhD's score higher on each research index than EdD's, those who have been associated with the high ranking universities, as either degree recipients or as professors, score higher than those who have not, and men score higher than women on each measure. In other words, while NCRE members are more research oriented than other reading experts, the same

factors are related to differences in the amount of research emphasis in the careers of both members and non-members.

While the differences between members and non-members are consistent and impressive, it should be pointed out that it does not require very much research activity to score high on any of these indices. Perhaps the fact that only a slight majority of the members of an organization devoted to research scores high on these generous measures is more significant than the fact that members are more research oriented than non-members.

A number of additional behaviors and attitudes were found to be associated with the amount of research emphasis in the careers of the reading experts. NCRE members share most of these with non-members, but there are some intriguing differences as well. Perhaps the most striking of these are that 81% of the NCRE members have published instructional materials, or textbooks on reading, compared with just 36% of the non-members; 90% have spoken publicly about the phonics controversy, compared with 64% of the non-members; and 80% have spoken publicly about the basal reader controversy, compared with just 53% of the non-members. Yet, in spite of these differences, I have been frustrated in all my attempts to demonstrate objectively that the most vocal and influential NCRE members have, in fact, influenced the opinions of anyone else regarding the best way to teach reading. Perhaps the questions I asked about such matters as when to teach phonics or when to start teaching reading were the wrong ones, but I must report the disconcerting fact that I have been unable to account for any appreciable differences in beliefs about how reading should be taught in the schools. The amount of research involvement of the respondent is virtually unrelated to any of these items on how reading should be taught; and the beliefs of respondents and those whom they claim to have been influenced by are no more alike than are any others.

Some Correlates of Research Orientation and The Role of NCRE

One of the general hypotheses of this study has been that the reading experts who are more research oriented are interstitial between the culture of the behavioral sciences and the liberal arts where research is king and the culture of education where teaching and service dominate. I was able to show that research oriented reading experts spoke about research more often with persons in other disciplines, read non-educational journals more often, and more often belonged to organizations which were not devoted exclusively to education. In addition, the researchers were more critical of both the quality of reading research and of the basal readers used in most schools. In other words, the acknowledged leaders in the field were not only far more research oriented than the rank and file, but they were also much more like non-educators. Research related behavior has promoted stronger affiliations with non-educators, and a more critical and cosmopolitan orientation toward one's own work. The generally lower prestige of education was admitted by a large majority of respondents, and within reading, the research leaders were the most like those in other fields with higher prestige.

NCRE members do not conform to these patterns quite as much as the research oriented reading experts who are not members of NCRE. The members of NCRE are far more critical of the basal readers than are other experts -- they do not think the suggestions found in the reading manuals are based on scientific truth, and they do not advocate the use of basal readers as strongly as the other experts. But the NCRE members belong to non-educational organizations no more often than non-members, they do not talk about research with people outside of education as often as non-members, and they do not read social or behavioral science journals any more often than the non-members. They do read educational journals more often

and belong to educational associations more often than non-members, and they score higher on the teacher training index as graduate students. In addition, NCRE members are less critical of the quality of research on reading than are the non-members.

I was somewhat surprised to discover that NCRE members did not interact with those outside of education more, belong to non-educational organizations more, or read non-educational journals more often than non-members since these were the patterns usually associated with higher research orientation. The fact that the NCRE members were even more deeply committed to the exclusively educational organizations and journals than the non-members, in spite of having a generally higher research involvement, suggested to me that I might have stumbled serendepitously upon one of the chief functions of the group. While many reading experts who become deeply involved in research are forced to seek advice and identification outside of the culture of education where research is more highly valued, NCRE appears to have provided an alternative mode of behavior for a group of the elite in the field. The NCRE has been a forum for this special group where it can discuss research problems which are of mutual interest and seek expert advice without having to venture outside the borders of education. That a group devoted this way to a substantive area of research could subsist successfully totally within education is a tribute to the unusual qualities of its members. But by the same token, its relative autonomy may have been somewhat disfunctional for the field of reading. To the extent that confidence in the collective skills of its membership prevented interaction with those outside of education and confrontation with the developing conceptual schemes in other fields which had relevance for reading, NCRE may have unwittingly set up barriers to achieving the goals for which it was organized.

I feel relatively safe in making these assertions today because there is some evidence of change in NCRE during recent years. I don't know to what extent these changes have been planned, but they are unmistakable. First of all, membership, including associate members, has just about doubled in the past five years. This would make some difference even if the new members were very similar to the old ones. Indeed, it may be spreading itself too thin. But perhaps most important, some new members come from outside of education. In fact, if I am not mistaken, speakers at this luncheon during the past few years have included a psychologist, a linguist, and now a sociologist. I doubt that even my talk today will succeed in reversing this trend. NCRE can no longer be accused of being completely in-bred. In addition, NCRE has had to learn to live in the new era of affluence in educational research. Its members have had to learn to compete for research funds and to commit themselves to spending the amounts of time and energy that supported research requires. A few years ago, it appeared that educators might end up doing very little of the significant research on education as the non-educators with established research skills moved in on the newly created research funds. I think this would have been disastrous. I have no idea what kind of division of labor or relative allocation of funds will eventually result, but I hope one consequence will be that some of the traditional barriers between educators and non-educators will be lowered in the pursuit of common objectives. Without institutionalizing linkages and two-way communication between research and the classroom, these common objectives cannot be obtained. I see the recent changes in NCRE as a much needed step in this direction, but we still have a long way to go.

FOOTNOTES

1. The most complete published statement to date can be found in Allen H. Barton and David E. Wilder, "Research and Practice in the Teaching of Reading: A Progress Report," in Innovation in Education, Matthew Miles, ed., Teachers College, Columbia University, 1964, pp. 361-399. This research was supported by a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

2. Bernard Barber, Science and the Social Order, Glencoe, The Free Press, 1952, and The Sociology of Science, ed. by Bernard Barber and Walter Hirsch, Glencoe, The Free Press, 1962.

3. Joseph Ben-David, "Scientific Productivity and Academic Organization in Nineteenth Century Medicine," American Sociological Review, Vol. 25 (1960), pp. 828-843.

4. Thomas S. Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, The University of Chicago Press, 1962.

5. Robert K. Merton, "Science and the Social Order," Chapter XV of Social Theory and Social Structure, The Free Press of Glencoe, 1957. See also Chapter XVIII.

6. Edwin G. Boring, "Masters and Pupils among the American Psychologists," The American Journal of Psychology, Vol. 61 (1948), pp. 527-534.

7. See especially The Scientific Movement in Education, Thirty-Seventh Yearbook, Part II, 1938, NSSE, F.N. Freeman, Chairman.

8. Lee J. Cronbach, "Issues Current in Educational Psychology," SSRC Conference on Mathematics and Learning, May, 1962, mimeo.

9. Bernard Berelson, Graduate Education in the United States, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1960.

10. This is the "localism" versus "cosmopolitanism" dimension which has been found to differentiate scientists in many different specialties. For a review of some of the studies using this dimension see Barney G. Glaser "The Local-Cosmopolitan Scientist," American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 69 (1963), pp. 249-259.

11. See especially Guy T. Buswell and T.R. McConnell, et al., Training for Educational Research, Center for the Study of Higher Education, University of California, Berkeley, 1966.

12. These were essentially the same combination of ratings used in Berelson op. cit.

13. The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, The Doctorate in Education, Vols. I-IV, Washington, D.C., 1960.

14. Buswell and McConnell, op. cit.